

TREATISE ON THE EDUCATION OF DAUGHTERS – ABRIDGED

[written by the celebrated Archbishop of Cambray, and translated by a Friend of the Author of the Museum.]

CHAP. I. Of the Importance of the Education of Daughters.

[Page 294] Nothing is more neglected than the education of daughters; custom, and the caprice^[1] of mothers, are for the most part absolutely decisive on that point. It is taken for granted, that a very little instruction is sufficient for the sex; whereas, the education of sons is looked upon as of principal concern to the public; and although there is scarce less mismanagement in this than in the bringing up of daughters, nevertheless people are fully persuaded that no small degree of discernment is requisite to assure success. How many masters do we see? How many colleges? What expense for impressions of books, for researches into the sciences, methods of learning languages, and choice of professors?

All these grand preparations have frequently more show than solidity; however, they indicate the high notion people have of the education of boys. As for girls, say they, what necessity is there for them to be scholars; curiosity makes them vain and conceited; it is sufficient they learn in time how to govern their families, and to submit to their ^[Page 295] husbands without debate: and here they are ready to produce a number of known instances of women grown ridiculous by pretense to scholarship; after this they think themselves justified in blindly abandoning girls to the management of ignorant and indiscreet mothers: it is true we ought to be very cautious of making pedantic ladies. Women, for the most part, have less strength of understanding than men, but more curiosity; wherefore it is not proper to engage them in studies likely to disturb their heads. It is not for them to govern the state, direct the operations of war, or to interfere in the administration of religious affairs. Thus they may stand excused from those extensive articles of knowledge relative to politics, the art military, jurisprudence, theology: even the far greater part of the mechanic arts^[2] are not suitable to them.

They are formed for gentler occupations: their bodies, as their understanding, are less vigorous, less robust than those of men; but nature, in compensation, has appropriated to them industry, neatness, and economy, and hence arises their taste for the calm duties of domestic life—But what are we to conclude from the natural weakness of women? The weaker they are, of the greater moment it is to give them strength. Have they not duties to fulfil, nay, duties on which the life of society depends? Is it not by them that families are ruined or upheld? They, who have the regulation of the whole train of domestic affairs^[3], who have a general influence upon manners, and by consequence the sway in what most nearly affects all mankind.

[Page 296]A woman of judgment, application, and real piety, is the soul of a whole great family: she inspires that order, that prudence, and purity of manners which secure happiness here and hereafter. It is not in the power of men, though vested with all public authority, by their deliberations, to make any establishments effectually good, unless women are aiding in the execution.

The world is not a phantom[4]: it is an assemblage[5] of families; and who can adjust the government of them with more exactness than the women? They, besides their natural authority, and assiduity[6] in their houses, have the further advantage of being born careful, minutely attentive, industrious, insinuating, and persuasive.

As for mankind, where else must they look for the comforts of life, if marriage, that closest of all alliances, shall be converted into bitterness? And children, who in their turn will be called mankind, what will become of them, if spoiled by their mothers from their infancy.

Observe the parts women have to act, they are not of less moment than those of the men; inasmuch as they have a house to regulate, a husband to make happy, children to bring up well; add that public virtue is no less necessary for the women than for the men. Without insisting on the good or evil import they may be of to the world, they are half of the human species redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and destined to life eternal. Finally, to omit the good influence of women well brought up, let us consider the evils they are productive of, in defect of an education [Page 297] inspiring them with virtue. It is certain this defect in them is more mischievous than in men, because the irregularities of men frequently proceed from the bad education they have imbibed from their mothers, and from those passions other women have inspired them within their riper[7] years.

What intrigues does history present to our view? What subversion of laws and morals? What bloody wars, innovations of religion, revolutions of state? All caused by the vices of women. These are proofs of the importance of a good education for girls. Let us next consider the means.

CHAP. II. The Inconveniences of the common Methods of Education.

[Page 368] It is owing to ignorance that a girl is weary of herself, and knows not how to relieve that languor by innocent employments: when she is arrived to a certain age without ever having applied to things solid, she is void of taste or esteem for them; everything serious is sad; everything that requires a continued attention is fatigue; the bias of pleasure, so strong in the days of youth; the example of other persons of the same age, plunged in amusement, tends to create an abhorrence[8] of a life of regularity and diligence. In these early days, she wants the experience and authority necessary for superintending anything in her father's house; she is not so much as sensible of what importance it is to apply herself that way, unless her mother has happened to take care to point out to her the several particulars. Is she of rank?[9] She is exempt from working with her hands: she will not work therefore, except for some little time in [Page 369]the day, because she was heard say, she knows not why, that it is reputable for ladies to do something: but this is often mere pretence; she cannot accustom herself to application.

In this situation what will she do? The company of a mother who watches all her motions, and is chiding her incessantly, who thinks she brings her up well in excusing nothing, who looks grave[10] upon her, who forces her to endure her humours, who seems ever burdened with domestic cares, is what both constrains and dispirits her; she has about her a set of flattering females, who, with a view to insinuate themselves, by a base and pernicious[11] complacency[12], fall in with all her fancies, and entertain her with everything that is likely to give distaste to what is right. Piety appears a tiresome business, a rule incompatible with every idea of pleasure. What then will she be doing? Nothing serviceable; and this very implication grows at length into an incurable habit. In the mean

time, behold a void which there is no hopes of filling up with things solid; therefore the frivolous must take place. In this idle state, a young lady abandons herself to laziness, the languor^[13] of the soul, and inexhaustible source of irksomeness.

She uses herself to more sleep than is confident with true health: this serves but to weaken her, to make her tender and more liable to bodily indisposition; whereas moderate sleep, with the use of regular exercise, produces liveliness, vigour, and strength, in which undoubtedly a perfect state of body consists, not to mention the advantages resulting to the mind.

[Page 370]From this union of softness and idleness, with ignorance, proceeds a pernicious sensibility^[14] for diversions and public shows; nay, it excites an indiscreet and insatiable^[15] curiosity. People versed and occupied in things of a serious nature, have in general but a moderate degree of curiosity; the knowledge they possess gives them a contempt for many things they do not know; they perceive the inutility^[16], the ridiculousness of the most part of those things which little minds that know nothing, and have nothing to do, are eager to be acquainted with: on the contrary, the imagination of girls, ill instructed and inattentive, is perpetually wandering for want of solid nourishment; their curiosity turns with eagerness upon objects of an empty and dangerous nature.

Those of genius set themselves up for *extraordinary women*, and read all the books that can feed their vanity; they are passionately fond of romances, of plays, of stories, of chimerical^[17] adventures, wherewith much profane love is intermixed; they give a visionary turn to their understanding, by using it to the magnificent language of the heroes of romance; they even spoil themselves for the world, because all these fine airy sentiments^[18], these generous passions, these adventures which the author of the romance has invented merely to please, have not the least relation to the real motives of action in the world, or to those that decide its affairs, nor yet to the false views discoverable in every undertaking.

A poor girl, full of the tender and the marvelous which have so charmed her in her studies, is [Page 371]astonished not to find the world afford any real personages resembling her heroes. She fain^[19] would live like the imaginary princesses, ever charming, ever adored, ever above all wants: alas! What mortification for her to descend from a state of heroism to the little cares of domestic life.

Some give their curiosity greater scope, and take upon them to decide on religious subjects, though beyond their reach: some with an understanding not large enough to entertain these ideas, have others proportionate to their capacity; they are violently inquisitive concerning what is said, what is done, about a song, a piece of news, an intrigue; eager to receive letters, to read those received by others; they will be told all, they will tell all; they are vain, and vanity makes them talkative; they are light, and lightness obstructs reflection, which would often teach them to be silent.

CHAP. III. What are the first Grounds of Education.

The natural curiosity of children is the forerunner of instruction; fail not to profit by it, for example, in the country they see a windmill, and want to know what it is, we ought to describe to them by what method the food of man is prepared. They [Page 378] observe mowers^[20] at work; we should explain what they are doing, how corn is sown, and how it increases upon the ground. In the city they behold shops, where many arts are carried on, and various sorts of merchandise sold: we ought

never to think their questions troublesome; they are overtures which nature makes for the readier admission of instruction: show you take a pleasure in them, and by this means you will insensibly teach them, how everything is prepared that is useful for man, and upon which commerce is founded.

By degrees, and without making a study of it, they will come to understand the best manner of executing things of use, and the true value of each, which is the sure ground of oeconomy[21]. This knowledge, which no one ought to despise, because it is very fit people should not be deceived in their expenses, is more especially necessary for young women.

Of the use of History for Children.

[Page 776] Children are very fond of strange stories: it is common to see them in high delight, or in tears, at the recital [22]of adventures: fail not to take advantage of this propensity; whenever you find them disposed to listen, tell them some short pretty fable, and let it be one relative to the animals, innocent and ingeniously composed: give them for what they are, fables; and explain the moral design of them.

As for the heathen[23] stories, it will be happy for a girl to remain totally ignorant of them all her life-time; because they are impure, and abound with impious[24] absurdities; but if you cannot prevent an acquaintance with some, do your endeavour to inspire an abhorrence of them.

When you have told one story, stay till the child asks for another, leaving as it were a craving upon him to be further informed; at length when his curiosity becomes excited, then have some select [Page 777]pieces of history to relate, in a compendious[25] manner: let there be a connection between them, and tell a particular part one day, and another the next, that he may be held in suspense, and in impatience to hear the conclusion.

Animate your accounts with a lively tone of voice and expression; and make the personages[26] speak: children of a lively imagination will fancy they both hear and see them: for example, recite the story of Joseph; make the brothers speak like brutish people; Jacob, like a fond afflicted father, Joseph, in his character, taking pleasure, when become the ruler over Egypt, in keeping himself from being known by his brethren[27], then putting them in dread of him, and at last discovering himself.

This natural representation, joined to the wonders of the history, will charm a child, provided he is not cloyed[28] of such things, but left to ask for them, or be promised them under the notion of reward; and when he is grown wiser, and provided we never offer them by way of a task, nor oblige them to a repetition; for this is a force upon him, and what will destroy all the pleasure he takes in these historical pieces.

However, it is to be observed, that if he hath any degree of facility in speaking, he will be naturally prone to relate to those he loves, whatever stories have given him the greatest entertainment; but you are not to set him this for a rule: you may get some person that is free with him to pretend a desire to hear the story; the child will be quite delighted to tell it, and do not seem to mind him, nor take any notice of his mistakes; when he comes [Page 778] to be better practiced, then you may with gentleness observe to him what is the best manner of telling a tale, to make it short, plain, and

natural, by the choice of such circumstances as best set forth things as they truly were. If you have a number of children, use them by degrees to represent the several personages in the history they have learned: let one be Abraham, another Isaac, etc. this personating[29] will delight them beyond other plays, and give them a habit of thinking and speaking serious matters with pleasure, and fix the transactions indelibly in their memory,

We ought to endeavour to give them a greater taste for sacred history than for any other; not by commending it as the finest, which perhaps they would not readily believe, but by bringing them to perceive it without a word said. Point out to their observation of what importance it is; how singular, marvelous, replete with natural paintings and nobly spirituous; the articles of the creation, the fall of Adam, the deluge, the call of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, the adventures of Joseph abovementioned, the birth and flight of Moses, are not only proper to awake the curiosity of children, but at the same time that they discover the origin of religion, they also lay the foundations of it in the young mind.

It would argue a profound ignorance of the essence of religion, not to see that it is entirely historical: for by a web of marvelous facts, do we find its establishment, its perpetuity[30], and all that ought to engage us to the belief and practice thereof.

[Page 779] Let it not be imagined that we have any intention that people should dip into science when we propose these histories to them; for they are brief, various, and proper to please the most ordinary understandings.

God, who best knows the spirit of man whom he created, hath thrown religion among popular facts, which far from overcharging the simple, assist them rather to conceive and retain the sense of its mystery: for instance, tell a child, that in God three co-equal persons make but one single nature; by hearing and repeating these terms, he will remember them; but, I doubt, not conceive the sense of them. Tell him then, how when Jesus Christ came out of the water of Jordan, the Father caused these words to be heard from heaven: 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.' Add, that the Holy Spirit descended upon our Saviour, in a bodily shape, like a dove, and you will make him sensibly perceive the Trinity in a passage which he will never forget: here are three persons whom he will ever distinguish by their different actions; you have but to teach him, that all taken together constitute but one God.

This example suffices to show the use of history, which, though it seems to be a prolix[31] method of instruction, is in reality the most compendious[32], and avoids the dry way of catechisms[33], wherein the mysteries are disjoined[34] from the facts; and we may know, that in the ancient times they taught by means of history. The admirable method of teaching which St. Austin prescribes, was not of that father's introduction; it was the universal practice [Page 780] of the church: this consisted in demonstrating, by a series of historical facts, religion to be as old as the world, Jesus Christ expected in the old testament, Jesus Christ reigning in the new: this is the bottom of Christian instruction.

This requires somewhat more time and application than the method of teaching to which some people confine themselves; however, by this series of history we are brought to a true knowledge of religion; whereas, when unacquainted with it, we have but confused notions of Jesus Christ, the

gospel, the church, and of the foundation of those virtues with which the name of Christian ought to inspire us.

The historical catechism printed a little while ago, a plain book, short, and much clearer than the common catechisms, includes all necessary to be known on that head, and of this no one will say that it requires a great deal of study.

To the passages I have before mentioned, let us add, the going through the Red Sea, the sojournment[35] of the people in the desert, where they eat the bread which fell from heaven, and drank of the water which Moses, by the stroke of his rod, made to spring out of the rock.

Represent to them the miraculous conquest of the Promised Land, on which occasion the waters of Jordan turned back toward their source, and the walls of a city fell down of themselves in the view of the besiegers[36]. Paint in natural colours the conflicts of Saul, and of David; show the last, while yet a stripling[37], without arms, and in his dress of a shepherd, the vanquisher of that [Page 781] proud giant Goliath. Let not be forgotten the glory and wisdom of Solomon, his decision of the dispute between the two women about the child; but then describe him fallen from that height of wisdom, dishonouring himself by ease and indulgence, the almost unavoidable consequence of extreme prosperity.

Make the prophets speak to the king, in the name of the Lord; let them read futurity as a volume; appear humble, of austere[38] life, and suffering continual persecution for the truth's sake.

Place in its due point of time the first destruction of Jerusalem; describe the temple burned, and the holy city ruined for the sins of the people: relate the captivity in Babylon, where the Jews bewailed[39] their beloved Sion: before their return bring in the pleasing relations of what befell Tobit, Judith, Esther, and Daniel.

It would have its usefulness, if children were brought to declare their thoughts on the different characters of these Saints, to know which affected them most: one would prefer Esther, another Judith: this would create a little contention, and so more strongly impress the stories upon their minds, and help to form their judgment.

After this, bring the people up to Jerusalem, and let them repair the ruins thereof; then form a lovely picture of the peace and prosperity of the city; in a short time after, give the portrait of that cruel and impious Antiochus, who died in hypocritical penitence[40].

Describe the victories of the Maccabees[41], under the reign of that persecutor; likewise the martyrdom[42] [Page 782] of the seven brethren, of the same family. Proceed to the miraculous birth of John the Baptist; then in course recount that of Jesus Christ; after which it will be proper to select out of the gospels all the most striking passages of his life, his preaching at the Temple at 12 years of age, his baptism, his retreat into the wilderness, and temptation, his calling his Apostles, the miracle of the loaves, the conversion of that woman sinner that anointed his feet with precious unguent, washed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair.

Tell how he taught the Samaritan woman, how cured the man born blind, raised Lazarus from the dead; show Jesus Christ entering triumphant into Jerusalem, show him upon the cross, and at length rising out of the Sepulchre.—After this it should be remarked, with how much familiarity he consorted with his Disciples for forty days together, even till they beheld him ascend up into Heaven; —besides this, the descent of the Holy Ghost, the stoning of St. Stephen, the conversion of Paul, the calling of the centurion[43] Cornelius, the travels of the apostles, and particularly of St. Paul, are exceedingly engaging: choose out the most wonderful stories of the martyrs[44], and something in general of the heavenly life of the primitive Christians, interspersed with instances of the courage of young virgins, the astonishing austerities[45] of the hermits, the conversion of the emperors and of the empire, the blindness of the Jews, and their terrible punishment, which lasted to this day.

[Page 783] These narrations will, in a delightful manner, impress on the tender and lively imagination of a child an entire series of religion from the creation of the world to our days; give them noble ideas of it, and such as will never be effaced[46]; they will perceive likewise in that history the hand of God ever lifted up to deliver the righteous, and to confound the wicked.

They will be used to see God, the efficient[47] cause, in all things, drawing interceptibly[48] into his designs those of his creatures that seem most repugnant to them.

But as to this collection of extracts, let it consist of such as afford the pleasantest, the most magnificent images; for we should by all means so manage it, that children may find religion charming, lovely, venerable; whereas their common notion of it is as of something melancholy, flat, and doleful[49].

Besides the inestimable benefit of thus teaching them religion, all these delightful narrations, so early infused into their memories, awaken a curiosity to be informed of things in their nature serious, render them sensible to the pleasures of the understanding, and interest them in whatever parts of history happen to bear any relation to such as they have already learned.

Yet, I say again, great care must be taken never to lay it down for a rule, that they must attend to you, must remember all; much more, never to prescribe stated lessons: no, let pleasure effect everything.

[Page 784] Do not urge them, and you will bring it to bare: even for ordinary understandings, the point is not to overcharge them, but wait the gradual rise of their curiosity.

But it will be objected—to relate these several parts of history in a lively, concise, natural, and pleasing manner, where are the governesses capable of it? To which I answer, that, in proposing it, I mean that people should endeavour to procure for their children persons of good parts, and put them as much as possible into this method of teaching, and so every governess[50] will perform according to her talent: but still, whatever her capacity is, matters will not go quite so wrong, when this natural and plain method is in practice.

To their narrations they may add the sight of prints or pictures, representing the sacred stories: prints will serve for general use. But if there should be an opportunity of showing the children good

pictures, let it not be neglected; for the glow of colours, and size of figures as big as the life, strike the imagination with much greater force.

[1] Freak; fancy; whim; sudden change of humour (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “Caprice. Capriccio. n.s.”).

[2] Relating to or involving manual labour or skill (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “mechanic, adj.”).

[3] House work including cleaning and cooking

[4] a spectre; an apparition or a fancied vision (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “phantom, n.s.”).

[5] A collection; a number of individuals brought together. It differs from *assembly*, by being applied only, or chiefly, to things; *assembly* being used only, or generally, of persons (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “family, n.s.”).

[6] Diligence; closeness of application (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “assiduity, n.s.”).

[7] Older years

[8] Detestation or hatred (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “abhorrence, n.s., 1-2”).

[9] Higher class, has a title or member of the nobility

[10] Seriously or harshly

[11] Mischievous in the highest degree; destructive (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “pernicious, adj.”).

[12] Pleasure; satisfaction; gratification (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “complacency, n.s.”).

[13] Weariness of body, mind, or faculties; tiredness, fatigue; torpor, lethargy. Also: drowsiness or inactivity, esp. when pleasurable; relaxation; an instance of this (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “languor, n.”).

[14] Mental perception, awareness, or understanding of something (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “sensibility, n.s.”).

[15] Greedy beyond measure; greedy so as not to be satisfied (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “insatiable, adj.”).

[16] Uselessness; unprofitableness (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “inutility, n.s.”).

[17] Imaginary; fanciful; wildly, vainly, or fantastically conceived; fantastic (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, “chimerical, adj.”).

[18] What one feels with regard to something; mental attitude (of approval or disapproval, etc.); an opinion or view as to what is right or agreeable. Often *plural* with collective sense (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “sentiment, n.”).

[19] “Gladly; very desirously; according to earnest wishes” (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “fain, adv.”).

[20] One who cuts with a scythe (a crooked blade joined at right angles to a long pole) (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “mower, n.s.”).

[21] Oeconomy was the practice of managing the economic and moral resources of the household for the maintenance of good order (<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com>).

[22] Repetition; rehearsal (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “recital, n.s.”).

[23] Gentile; pagan (not religious)

[24] Irreligious; wicked; profane; without reverence of religion (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “heathen, adj.”).

[25] Short; summary; abridged; direct; comprehensive; holding much in a narrow space; near; by which time is saved, and circuition (The act of going round anything) cut off.

[26] A person of high rank, distinction, or importance; a person of note (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “personage, n.”).

[27] Brother (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “word”).

[28] To stop up, block, obstruct, choke up (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “cloyed, adj.”).

[29] To play or act a part; to masquerade; to pretend to be another person (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “personating, v.”).

[30] Something of which there is no end (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “perpetuity, n.”).

[31] Long; tedious; not concise; of long duration (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “prolix, adj.”).

[32] Short; summary; abridged; direct; comprehensive; holding much in a narrow space; near; by which time is saved, and circuition cut off (*Johnson’s Dictionary Online*, “compendious, adj.”).

[33] A form of instruction by means of questions and answers, concerning religion

[34] To sunder, dissolve, break up (a state or condition of union); to undo, unfasten (a knot or tie) (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “disjoined, adj.”).

[35] The stay

- [36] One employed in a siege or battle (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "besieger, n.").
- [37] A youth; one in the state of adolescence (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "stripling, n.s.").
- [38] Severe; harsh; rigid (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "austere, adj.").
- [39] To bemoan; to lament; to express sorrow for (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "bewail, v.a.").
- [40] Repentance; sorrow for crimes; contrition for sin, with amendments of life or change of the affections.
- [41] A member or supporter of a Jewish family, most notably Judas Maccabaeus, who led a religious revolt in Judaea against the Syrian Seleucid king Antiochus IV c167 b.c., as recorded in the Books of the Maccabees.
- [42] "The death of a martyr; the honour of a martyr" (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "martyrdom, n.s.").
- [43] A military officer among the Romans, who commanded an hundred men (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "centurion, n.s.").
- [44] One who by his death bears witness to the truth (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "martyr, n.s.").
- [45] Severity; mortified life; strictness (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "austerity, n.s.").
- [46] To destroy
- [47] Causing effects; that which makes the effect to be what it is (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "efficient, n.s.").
- [48] Translated from French to mean secretly
- [49] Sorrowful; dismal; expressing grief (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "doleful, adj.").
- [50] A tutoress; a woman that has the care of young children (*Johnson's Dictionary Online*, "governess, n.s.").